

Barriers and Enablers to the Implementation of Connecticut's Anti-bullying Legislation -

Andrew Martinez (DePaul University) In 2011 the Connecticut General Assembly unanimously passed Public Act 11-232, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws*. This law requires Connecticut's 169 school districts to adopt strategies to (1) investigate alleged acts of bullying and intervene once they have been verified, (2) prevent acts of bullying from occurring by creating safe school environments, and (3) conduct biennial school climate assessments. While the enactment of these statutes is laudable, research conducted in other states has found that state anti-bullying legislation does not always reach its intended objectives of reducing bullying due to problems with implementation at the district and school levels.

This investigation is divided into two projects targeting these three components of Connecticut's new anti-bullying legislation. In the first investigation we conduct qualitative interviews with 30 key informants statewide working at the school and school district levels to better understand factors that inhibit or promote the ability to intervene in acts of bullying and create safe school environments. Information gathered from these interviews will help the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) generate recommendations to amend the legislation to better meet the objectives of reducing bullying. To this end, data gathered from this study will help CSDE identify factors that facilitate or obstruct policy implementation within schools and school districts that can then be addressed through statutory changes. In addition, CSDE will also use this information to strengthen these statutes by generating recommendations to more clearly delineate policy calling for the creation of safe school environments.

In the second investigation, we conduct a web-based survey administered across all schools (N=1,200) within Connecticut. This survey is designed to assess how schools administer their school climate assessments during the first year of implementation. In particular, we examine (1) which school climate assessments are used by schools, (2) who is surveyed, (3) perceived school strengths, (4) perceived school weakness, (5) common barriers to conducting school climate assessments, and (6) common barriers to the application of these data to guide school climate interventions.

Overall, we use Community Psychology's theoretical frameworks regarding system-level change to examine how state bullying statutes are implemented within schools. Specifically, we use an Ecological Process Model of Systems Change (Peirson, Boydell, Fergus, & Ferris, 2011) to help identify important underlying processes of implementation, and how resources, interdependence, and adaptation play a role within these processes.